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My Love of Books: Source of Life Support

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Book Reviews from page 51

ment public relations. **Worth**, who took over research for this new edition of *This Day in American History*, is a historian living in Richmond, Virginia. One of their strengths is the ability to present information in an unbiased fashion that allows readers to draw their own conclusions regarding the reason for an event's significance. For example, on April 30, 2000, "At least 200,000 pro-gay rights demonstrators held a rally on National Mall, Washington, DC; some estimates went far higher; their first massive Washington rally since 1993." There is no judgment of this controversial event, only that it reflects sentiments and attitudes deemed important by our "ever-changing society" (to use **Worth's** own words). Also, in a mere 25 words, this entry touches on the many connections highlighted in this event: demonstrations as a display of opinion, minority groups, sociology, sexuality, and a snippet of the history of pro-gay rights.

While *This Day in American History* presents historical facts, *The Historian's Toolbox* discusses the ways in which historians look at facts. Don't let the term "toolbox" fool you; as a librarian, I immediately assumed that **Williams'** book was a bibliography of sorts, pointing readers in the direction of volumes of primary sources, comprehensive

studies on major spans of history, and notable historiographies. Though there is a selected bibliography at the end of the book as well as endnotes for each chapter, **Williams'** work is not merely a go-to list of sources. Rather, *The Historian's Toolbox* guides budding historians in the processes, best practices, and techniques of the discipline, always relating the subject of the oft-distant past to one's personal perspective. His introduction offers instant evidence of his desire to show history's easy access. Entitled "History is Fun," **Williams** explains in the opening pages that history is neither art nor science but craft, and there is "no better way to understand a craft than to pursue it yourself" (xiv).

The Historian's Toolbox is divided into three sections. In the first, "The Craft of History," **Williams** looks at historiography and the evolution of history, different structures of history (such as metahistory and antihistory), and history's relationship with the future. In the second section, "The Tools of History," he opens the proverbial toolbox and covers many necessary elements for "doing history": effective reading and writing, primary and secondary sources, artifacts, images, and the like. This section also encompasses topics of plagiarism, conspiracies, fiction and film as history (note the interdisciplinarity), and more. Finally, in the third section (new to this edition), **Williams** explores "The Relevance of History" through everyday people, material culture, public his-

tory, current event analysis, and the Internet. Each chapter is brief and **Williams'** writing style is engaging.

When I was a student at the **College of Charleston**, **Richard Marius'** *A Short Guide to Writing About History* was the manual used by students in upper-level history courses. **Marius'** popular book is an excellent tool, but I would have certainly benefited from **Williams'** uncomplicated overview of the discipline.

The straightforward presentation of *This Day in American History* and *The Historian's Toolbox* makes them excellent resources for any historian — whether in high school, college, or graduate school; whether professional or amateur; and whether serious or just curious. The fact is, we're all historians whether we realize it or not; or so claims **Williams**. History is "not some arcane academic enterprise, but a deep structure that underlies our own lives" (*Toolbox*, 151). We each have our own historical memory, we keep records and evidence, we research, we argue, we tell stories, and we experience events. What these books have in common in the accessibility they both lend to history; history doesn't have to be wordy or long-winded, and the events and consequences that shape history have different meanings to different people. Both of these updated editions should be in your high school, academic, and public libraries.



My Love of Books: Source of Life Support

by **Nedelina Tchangelova** (Librarian, Engineering & Physical Sciences Library, University of MD Libraries, College Park, MD 20742; Phone: 301-405-9151; Fax: 301-405-9164) <nedelina@umd.edu> Yahoo, AIM, MSN, Google Talk: NTlibrarian
http://www.lib.umd.edu/ENGIN/profile_Tchangelova.html

*Wisdom is wealth, and every good book is equivalent to a wise head —
the head may die, but the book may live forever.*

— **Joseph Wheeler**

My love of books sprang out of a lack of hearing. I was born with normal hearing but lost it partially due to a doctor's mistake. I grew up in Bulgaria facing many challenges and switching back and forth between the world of silence and the world of sound. This event has marked my entire life and shaped my love of books.

"What can not be heard, can be read," I started devouring books. For me, the library wasn't a storage building filled with books — it was a bright stream of thought and spiritual nourishment. After completing my M.S. degree in Chemical Engineering in 1995, I took a position at the **National Polytechnic Museum** in Sofia. Rather than building machines as I was trained, I succumbed to my constant thirst for knowledge, followed my heart, and worked as a curator. One day, my boss asked me to come up with fresh ideas for new exhibits. The first place I instinctively sought for inspiration was ... the library. You got it right! The mu-

seum had a small collection of books stuck in boxes, covered with dust. It was winter and due to poor funding, the storage room had broken windows and no heat. There was only one dilapidated mechanical typewriter in the entire museum. In the midst of these unappealing conditions I started opening the boxes and melted at the sight of the dusty books from unknown authors. **G. Keillor's** words captured this moment in my life when he said, "Unread authors are kept in the underground crypts of libraries waiting to be rediscovered." Sitting on the floor, immersed in solitude, I began my exploration to find the hidden treasures of the books. It was as though they brought me back in a time machine through the history of science as I rediscovered the history of technology and its inventions. I traveled in awe of the human mind: its excellence and its undertakings that have improved our quality of life from generation to generation. I began organizing the books thoroughly and forgot

about deadlines. My boss reminded me of the responsibilities I had: to set up exhibits, not to read and organize books.

That day, my husband received a green card in the mail. Six months later, we flew to the United States where I continued to follow my dream to read books. With no English fluency and limited hearing capabilities, I called my friends, the books, to help me to get into the library school. Considering my newness to this country and its language, in retrospect I demonstrated great foresight and courage by entering the program at the **University of Maryland Library School**. I wanted to accomplish my dreams and upon the completion of the program, I proudly became a librarian. So, here I am ... daily managing electronic information, and although homesick for print books, I look for ways to save them from the Internet monster. Why? When I began writing this essay, I searched the Internet for some ideas. Nothing happened ... my mind remained blank, no inspiration, and no motivation to look further. Instinctively I returned to my friends, the print books, and suddenly through quotes I felt the inspiration penetrate my mind and

continued on page 53

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My Love of Books ... from page 52

my heart. Eureka! I contemplated my first encounter with printed materials. I always knew that "good books are friends who are always ready to talk to [me]."² No matter how limited and unappealing my experience with books was in the times of communist Bulgaria, even then, I saw clearly my love of books as the distinctive thread linking my past, present, and future. 🐭

Editor's Note: Published here is the winning essay of the *Rachel K. Schenk Memorial Scholarship*, August 2007. The *Schenk Scholarship* was funded for five years. 2007 was the final year. Thanks to Jack Walsdorf for his support. — KS

Endnotes

1. G. Keillor, closing session presentation, *American Library Association Conference*, Washington, DC, June 27, 2007.
2. W. Mieder, S. Kingsbury, and K. Harder, (1992). *Dictionary of American Proverbs*. New York: Oxford University Press.

against the grain people profile

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Nedelina Tchangalova

BORN & LIVED: Sofia, Bulgaria. I currently live in Germantown, MD.

EARLY LIFE: I had a wonderful childhood switching back and forth from the large city and the rural village where my grand-parents lived. First, I read books surrounded by farm animals and later by... computers.

FAMILY: Widow with two children. My husband died from blood cancer (leukemia) in 2005.

EDUCATION: Two Masters degree earned: Chemical Engineering from Bulgaria and Library & Information Sciences from **University of Maryland**, College Park, MD, USA.

FIRST JOB: The **National Polytechnic Museum** in Bulgaria served as my initial source of inspiration to pursue a library degree later in the United States while working as a circulation technician at the **Howard County Public Library**, Columbia, MD.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: Collection development in science, technology and engineering with emphasize on reference materials. At the national level, I'm involved with the work of **Science & Technology Section (STS)**. Current research area is focused on library staff with hidden disabilities.

IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE TO: I love to escape from the digital environment by riding a bike in the nature with the kids, and of course ... reading books.

FAVORITE BOOKS: All books written by **Shirley MacLaine**, American film and theatre actress.

PET PEEVES/WHAT MAKES ME MAD: A person who doesn't say a word and forces me to figure out what he/she wants to tell me. So, please speak, don't stand mute!

PHILOSOPHY: Think positively and smile often. When you see a high mountain, climb it; don't run back! Once on the top, enjoy the view! 🐭

